

# **The Impact of Non-Formal Learning in Youth Exchanges on Competence Development**

Impact assessment report

Author: Sergiu Sanda-Mir, Senior Trainer

# Context and Summary

The **ECO-ACT: Ecological Action for a Cleaner Tomorrow** youth exchange provided the foundation for this impact report. Implemented between **June 1, 2024, and August 31, 2025**, with the main mobility taking place from **March 8 to March 16, 2025**, in **Horezu, Romania**, the project brought together **40 young participants (16-24 years old) and six group leaders** from three countries. A significant portion of participants came from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those facing economic obstacles, geographical isolation, and migrant or ethnic minority communities.

Coordinated by the **Pro Dezvoltare DACIA Association (APDD) - Romania**, the project aimed to **enhance environmental awareness, promote sustainability practices, and develop key competencies** through non-formal education. Activities such as **workshops, awareness campaigns, and practical ecological actions** provided experiential learning opportunities, fostering **intercultural understanding, communication skills, and active citizenship**.

The impact report highlights the project's success in improving participants' **intercultural competence, multilingual communication, personal development, and environmental engagement**, demonstrating the effectiveness of non-formal education in empowering young people for a more sustainable future.

The study employs **pre- and post-exchange self-assessments** to measure the program's effectiveness in enhancing key competencies. Findings

indicate a significant increase in **cultural awareness and confidence in intercultural communication**, facilitated by experiential learning activities such as **role-playing, storytelling, and intercultural evenings**. Similarly, multilingual skills improved as participants developed alternative communication strategies, leveraging **digital tools and non-verbal communication** to overcome language barriers. In terms of personal development, participants reported **greater self-confidence, improved social adaptability, and stronger collaboration skills** as a result of **team-building exercises and reflective learning**.

The exchange also had a measurable impact on **environmental awareness and civic engagement**. Pre-exchange data showed **limited knowledge of sustainability practices in different cultural contexts**, whereas post-exchange results highlighted a **shift toward more eco-conscious behaviors**, such as **increased recycling and waste reduction efforts**. Through **interactive workshops, field activities, and peer-led initiatives**, participants gained a deeper understanding of **sustainability and global environmental challenges**.

Overall, the findings underscore the **transformative potential of non-formal education in youth development**, demonstrating its effectiveness in **enhancing key competencies, fostering social inclusion, and promoting active citizenship**. The results support the integration of **experiential learning methodologies** in youth mobility projects to **empower young people as proactive agents of change in their communities**.

# About the Assessment Tool and Methodology Used

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## 1. Introduction: Purpose and Scope

This assessment tool has been designed to evaluate the impact of non-formal education (NFE) in youth exchange programs, particularly in developing key competencies among young participants. The tool is structured around the 8 Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (Youthpass framework) while maintaining a strong focus on intercultural competence as a central theme.

By using pre- and post-surveys alongside semi-structured interviews, this tool captures both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing youth workers, facilitators, and researchers to measure the personal, social, and professional growth of participants in a structured and evidence-based way.

## 2. Target Group and Context of Use

- Designed for participants in youth exchanges (ages 16-30) engaging in multicultural, experiential learning environments.
- Can be used by youth workers, facilitators, trainers, researchers, and organizations seeking to assess learning outcomes in Erasmus+ and other non-formal education programs.
- The tool is especially relevant for intercultural and environmental-themed exchanges, though it can be adapted for other topics.

## 3. Structure of the Tool

The tool is built around three key components:

1. Pre-Survey (Before the Exchange)
  - Establishes a baseline of participants' competences.
2. Semi-Structured Interviews
  - Collects in-depth reflections on the learning experience.

Each section explores competence development in a clear and accessible way, ensuring B1-B2 English learners can fully engage.

## 4. Pre-Surveys: Measuring Competence Development

The surveys consist of Likert-scale statements and open-ended questions to assess self-perceived competence levels before and after the exchange.

### Survey Topics & Competences Assessed

1. Intercultural Competence (Cultural awareness, adaptability, communication in diverse settings).
2. Multilingual Competence (Confidence in using and understanding different languages).
3. Citizenship Competence (Understanding diversity, inclusion, and social participation).

4. Entrepreneurship Competence (Problem-solving, creativity, teamwork in a diverse environment).
5. Cultural Awareness and Expression (Appreciation for artistic and cultural diversity).
6. Digital Competence (Use of digital tools for learning and communication).
7. Mathematical and Science Competence (Logical thinking and environmental awareness in an intercultural setting).

#### **Pre-Survey (Before the Exchange) – Example Questions**

Likert Scale (1- Strongly Disagree → 5- Strongly Agree)

- I feel comfortable working with people from different cultures.
- I am open to different cultural perspectives, even when they challenge my own.
- I feel confident expressing myself in a language that is not my mother tongue.
- I believe cultural diversity makes a team stronger.

#### **Open-Ended Questions**

- What do you expect to learn from this exchange?
- What challenges do you think you might face when working in an intercultural group?

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#### **5. Semi-Structured Interviews: In-Depth Reflection**

*The interviews provide qualitative insights into the participant's learning journey, complementing the survey data with real-life stories and*

**reflections. The questions remain simple and accessible while addressing all 8 Key Competences.**

#### **Interview Structure & Example Questions**

##### **1. Personal Background & First Thoughts**

- Before this exchange, had you worked with people from different cultures? How did you feel about it?
- What did you expect to learn from this experience?

##### **2. Intercultural Competence & Personal Learning**

- Can you describe a moment when you learned something new about another culture?
- How did you handle any cultural differences or misunderstandings in the group?

##### **3. Multilingual Competence**

- What languages did you hear or use during the exchange?
- Did you learn new words or phrases?

##### **4. Citizenship Competence**

- How did this experience change your view on diversity and inclusion?
- Did you feel more connected to other cultures after the exchange?

##### **5. Entrepreneurship Competence**

- Did you take initiative in any group task or problem-solving activity?
- How did you and your team make decisions when you had different opinions?

##### **6. Cultural Awareness and Expression**

- Did you experience cultural traditions, music, or art during the exchange? How did that impact your learning?
- Did you share something from your own culture? What was the reaction?

#### 7. Digital Competence

- Did you use any digital tools to help with communication or learning?

#### 8. Environmental & Scientific Awareness

- Did you learn anything new about environmental issues from different cultural perspectives?
- Will you change anything in your daily life because of what you learned?

#### 9. Final Reflections & Future Application

- What was the most important thing you learned?
- How will you use what you learned in the future?
- Would you recommend this kind of experience to others?

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### 6. Data Collection & Analysis

The tool provides both quantitative (Likert-scale responses) and qualitative (open-ended and interview responses) data, allowing for:

- Pre/Post Comparison – Measuring changes in self-perceived competencies.

- Thematic Analysis – Identifying common themes in interview responses.
- Participant Testimonials – Using direct quotes to illustrate impact.

This mixed-method approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how non-formal education in youth exchanges impacts competence development.

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### 7. Practical Application of the Tool

- Youth Workers & Facilitators – To measure learning impact and improve future programs.
- Organizations – To provide data for reporting and funding applications (e.g., Erasmus+ impact evaluation).
- Participants – To reflect on their own learning and personal growth.
- Researchers – To analyze the role of non-formal education in competence development.

### 8. Why This Tool Matters?

This assessment tool helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice in non-formal education. By systematically measuring competence development, it highlights how youth exchanges contribute to lifelong learning and intercultural growth.

Through a simple, structured, and research-based approach, this tool provides valuable insights for anyone working in the field of youth work, intercultural learning, and non-formal education.

# Interview insights report

## 1. Introduction

This report presents an in-depth analysis of interview responses collected post-exchange, focusing on the development of intercultural competence, communication skills, and personal growth. The goal is to assess the qualitative impact of non-formal education methodologies used during the exchange program.

## 2. Methodology

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with participants after the exchange. The analysis follows a thematic approach, categorizing responses under key competence areas. A comparison was made between pre-exchange expectations and post-exchange reflections to identify key differences and learning outcomes.

## 3. Key findings from the interviews

### Intercultural competence development

Before the exchange, some participants expressed hesitation about engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds, fearing misunderstandings or difficulty adapting to new traditions. Limited awareness of personal cultural biases was also evident in some responses. By the end of the exchange, participants reported a much deeper appreciation for cultural diversity. Activities such as intercultural evenings, storytelling, and role-playing were particularly impactful in fostering understanding. Many

participants learned to navigate cultural differences through open communication and active listening, while also becoming more aware of their own cultural identities and biases. The non-formal learning approach, particularly through engaging group discussions, helped challenge stereotypes and provided an opportunity for critical self-reflection. Experiential learning played a crucial role in offering direct exposure to cultural nuances, fostering adaptability, and encouraging curiosity.

### Communication and multilingual competence

A major concern before the exchange was the potential language barrier. Some participants anticipated struggling to express themselves in a foreign language and feared that communication difficulties might prevent them from fully engaging in discussions. However, by the end of the exchange, many developed a newfound confidence in multilingual communication. The use of digital tools such as Google Translate, WhatsApp, and Padlet proved essential in bridging language gaps. Non-verbal communication strategies, including gestures and active listening, became indispensable in ensuring understanding between participants. Interactive language exercises and team discussions provided a supportive environment for language development, while collaborative tasks in multilingual teams helped foster adaptability in communication.

### Personal growth and social skills

Before the exchange, some participants anticipated difficulties in social interactions and worried about how they would adapt to new group dynamics. By the end of the

experience, many reported significant increases in self-confidence and a greater willingness to express their opinions. The ability to work effectively in diverse teams improved, with several participants highlighting their stronger collaboration and adaptability skills. Some individuals who had initially been hesitant or shy became more engaged in discussions and activities. The non-formal learning methodology contributed to this transformation through structured team-building activities that helped participants break initial hesitations. Reflection circles provided opportunities for self-assessment, allowing participants to recognize their personal growth and learning progress. Collaborative challenges pushed individuals out of their comfort zones in a supportive and inclusive environment.

#### **Environmental awareness and citizenship competence**

Prior to the exchange, many participants expected to learn about different sustainability approaches across cultures. Some assumed there would be substantial differences in how environmental issues were perceived and addressed by participants from different countries. By the end of the program, most had gained valuable insight into diverse approaches to sustainability, yet some were surprised to find that environmental concerns and solutions were often quite similar across cultures. A significant number of participants expressed a commitment to adopting more sustainable practices in their personal lives, such as recycling more and reducing waste. The use of interactive field activities and group discussions enabled participants to actively engage with environmental challenges, while cultural exchanges on sustainability promoted a deeper understanding of global citizenship.

#### **4. Notable transformations observed**

Many participants transitioned from uncertainty to confidence in their intercultural communication abilities. Initial concerns regarding language barriers were overcome as participants developed strategies to navigate multilingual interactions. The experience also fostered personal growth, with previously reserved individuals becoming more actively engaged. There was a clear shift from passive participation to active involvement, demonstrating increased self-confidence and leadership skills. Furthermore, many participants reported becoming more mindful of sustainability and cultural biases, indicating a long-term shift toward a more inclusive and responsible mindset.

#### **5. Conclusion and recommendations**

The qualitative findings from the interviews **confirm that non-formal education plays a crucial role in developing intercultural competence, communication skills, and personal growth.** Participants demonstrated a clear transformation, progressing from uncertainty and hesitation to confidence and adaptability. Interactive and experience-based learning methods proved particularly effective in fostering these developments.

To further enhance the impact of future programs, it is recommended to continue integrating interactive cultural exchange activities such as storytelling and intercultural evenings. Encouraging the use of digital tools for multilingual communication training can further support language learning and interaction. Expanding self-reflection sessions would help participants track their personal growth more effectively. Additionally, strengthening post-exchange engagement

opportunities would ensure the sustainability of competence development beyond the duration of the exchange.

The transformation observed in participants highlights the power of

non-formal education in shaping future global citizens. Facilitators and program designers should continue leveraging these methodologies to create impactful and meaningful learning experiences.

# Consolidated Assessment Report

**1. Introduction** This report presents an analysis of the impact of non-formal education in youth exchanges, focusing on the development of key competencies among participants. The study includes a comparison of pre-exchange survey data with post-exchange interview responses to assess changes in intercultural competence, communication skills, and personal growth. Special emphasis is placed on the role of non-formal learning methodologies in fostering these improvements.

**2. Methodology** To assess the impact of the youth exchange, the following research tools were used:

- **Pre-Exchange Survey:** A questionnaire measuring participants' initial perceptions, expectations, and self-assessment of key competences.
- **Post-Exchange Interviews:** A series of structured interviews focusing on participants' reflections, learning outcomes, and perceived growth.
- **Comparison Analysis:** A direct comparison between pre-exchange and post-exchange responses to identify significant changes in competences.
- **Visual Data Representation:** Graphs and charts illustrate changes in key competencies over time.

## 3. Key Competences and Findings

### 3.1 Intercultural Competence

**Before the Exchange:** Participants exhibited moderate confidence in their intercultural competence, with an average self-rating of 3.2 out of 5. Concerns primarily revolved around communication barriers and potential misunderstandings, coupled with a limited awareness of their own cultural biases.

**After the Exchange:** Following the program, participants demonstrated increased confidence in engaging with diverse groups and developed a heightened awareness of cultural perspectives. Experiential learning activities played a crucial role in fostering a deeper appreciation for diversity.

**Impact of Non-Formal Learning:** Interactive methods such as role-playing, storytelling, and intercultural evenings facilitated immersive learning experiences. Group discussions and debates encouraged participants to recognize and challenge their personal biases, fostering a more open and inclusive mindset.

### 3.2 Communication and Multilingual Competence

**Before the Exchange:** Several participants expressed hesitation about speaking in a foreign language, anticipating significant language barriers that might hinder effective communication.

**After the Exchange:** Confidence in multilingual communication increased significantly, with participants demonstrating greater ease in using

different languages. Digital tools such as Google Translate and WhatsApp proved instrumental in bridging language gaps, while active listening and non-verbal communication strategies played a vital role in facilitating understanding.

#### **Impact of Non-Formal Learning:**

Exercises focused on non-verbal communication helped participants develop alternative strategies for interaction. Additionally, multilingual group discussions provided valuable opportunities for real-world language practice, reinforcing their linguistic adaptability.

### **3.3 Personal Growth and Social Skills**

**Before the Exchange:** Some participants reported feelings of shyness and discomfort in social settings, along with concerns about their ability to adapt to group dynamics.

**After the Exchange:** The program significantly enhanced self-confidence and encouraged individuals to express their opinions more freely. Participants also developed stronger group cohesion and collaboration skills, contributing to a more supportive and inclusive environment.

#### **Impact of Non-Formal Learning:**

Team-building activities helped break initial social barriers, fostering trust and mutual understanding. Reflection exercises further enabled self-assessment, allowing participants to recognize their personal growth and development.

### **3.4 Environmental Awareness and Citizenship Competence**

**Before the Exchange:** Participants had limited knowledge of sustainability approaches in different countries but

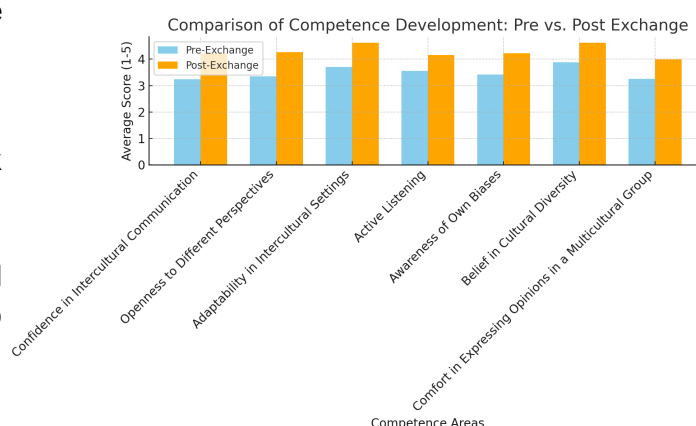
expressed interest in learning about best environmental practices.

**After the Exchange:** Exposure to diverse cultural perspectives on sustainability broadened participants' understanding of environmental responsibility. Many committed to making tangible changes in their daily habits, such as increasing recycling efforts and reducing waste.

#### **Impact of Non-Formal Learning:**

Interactive workshops and field activities provided hands-on engagement with environmental issues, reinforcing practical applications of sustainability. Discussions on global environmental challenges within an intercultural framework further strengthened participants' sense of global citizenship.

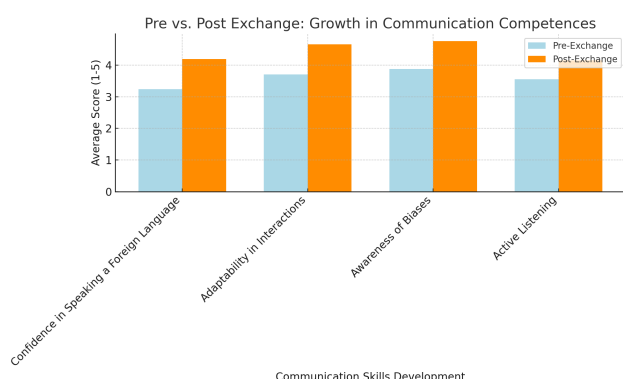
**4. Visual Data Representation** Below is a comparative chart showcasing the **growth in key competences** as a result of the youth exchange experience:



This visualization highlights the **improvement in intercultural confidence, adaptability, active listening, and cultural awareness**

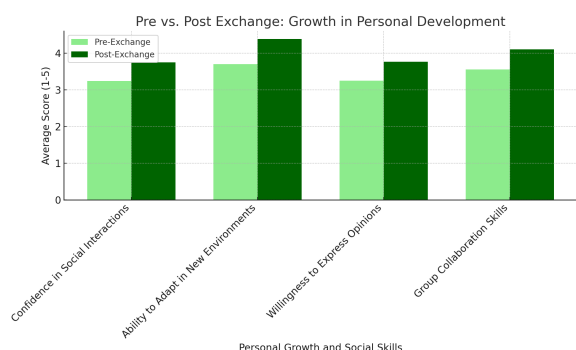
post-exchange. The impact of non-formal learning in these areas is evident through the significant increase in participants' self-perceived competence levels.

Additionally, the following chart showcases the growth in **communication skills**:



This second visualization demonstrates how **non-formal learning enhanced language confidence, adaptability, active listening, and the use of digital tools for overcoming language barriers.**

Furthermore, the chart below illustrates the **development of personal growth and social skills**:



This third visualization highlights improvements in **self-confidence, adaptability, collaboration, and expression of opinions**, showing how non-formal education fosters meaningful personal development.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

The analysis demonstrates that non-formal education in youth exchanges plays a significant role in developing intercultural competence, communication skills, and personal growth. The combination of experiential learning, group discussions, and interactive activities fosters meaningful and long-lasting learning experiences.

### Key Recommendations:

- Continue integrating **role-playing and storytelling** for deeper cultural engagement.
- Expand the use of **digital tools** for communication training in multilingual settings.
- Increase **self-reflection activities** to help participants recognize their growth.
- Encourage post-exchange **follow-up activities** to sustain learning outcomes.

**Final Thought:** Non-formal learning is a powerful tool in youth exchanges, enabling young people to develop essential life skills, increase their cultural awareness, and become more effective global citizens. Future programs should continue leveraging these methodologies to maximize impact.